

# CALVINISM

Biblically Examined by Glen Osburn

## Introduction:

### Text:

As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude. *See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ (Colossians 2:6-8).*

But evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving *and being deceived* (2 Timothy 3:13).

These passages warn us of the very real possibility of our being deceived, either through the efforts of others, or by deceiving ourselves through a desire to believe something that may not be taught in Scriptures (2 Timothy 4:3-4). Knowing this, God has made provision for us to escape from others who would deceive us, or to correct ourselves if we are unaware of our error. As followers of Christ we are told simply to "test" beliefs, that is, "examine everything carefully" and then to "hold fast to that which is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21 NAS). Like the Bereans, we are obligated to examine religious ideas with the Scriptures "to see whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11; see also 2 Timothy 3:16). Based upon this obligation, we would like to examine the principle tenets of Calvinism.

When someone believes:

1. That one is saved by *faith alone* or *faith only*,
2. That *faith is a gift* of God acquired through a direct operation of the Holy Spirit,
3. That *man has no spiritual ability* to sincerely choose *to believe in or obey* God without a direct operation of the Holy Spirit,
4. That those who acquire faith have been *previously chosen* by God to obtain this ability ("predestination"),
5. That once a child of God *it is impossible* to sin in such a way as *to lose* salvation ("once saved, always saved"), they have embraced some of the tenets of Calvinism.

Remember, we are concerned for the souls of all people, but oppose false doctrine. We are examining ideas, not the people who hold these ideas to be valid.

## **History:**

John Calvin

Born: Noyon, France, July 10, 1509 - Died May, 27, 1564 (near age 55).

He lived the same time as Martin Luther (although 25 years younger) and influenced Luther's Long and Short Catechism.

He published "Institutes of the Christian Religion" at age 26, which went through five editions growing from six to eighty chapters.

He helped organize the "Reformed Church" with Ulrich Zwingli & John Knox.

Calvinism has profoundly affected the Protestant movement.

If, in your investigation, you probe into the history and influence of Calvinism, you will discover that its doctrines have been incorporated into the majority of the great creeds of the Protestant churches (The Five Points of Calvinism, David N. Steele & Curtis C. Thomas, Presbyterian & Reformed Pub. Co., 1963, p. 61).

Calvinism has formed the doctrinal basis of the Presbyterian Church, the Reformed Church, the Episcopal Church of America, and in the main the Baptist and Congregationalist Churches, which include the United Church of Christ. Most aspects of Calvinistic ideology are found in the Nazarene Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church, and almost all so called "Evangelical" churches. (See McClintock & Strong, Vol. 2, p. 47.)

The five points of Calvinism are not original with John Calvin:

The Reformation was essentially a revival of Augustinianism and through it evangelical Christianity again came into its own (The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination, Loraine Boettner, Presbyterian & Reformed Pub. Co., 1932, p. 367).

An easy way to remember the basic theological system championed by John Calvin is an acronym "T-U-L-I-P" (The Five Points of Calvinism, Edwin H. Palmer, Baker Book House, 1972, p. 6);

**T** - Total Depravity,  
**U** - Unconditional Election,  
**L** - Limited Atonement,  
**I** - Irresistible Grace,  
**P** - Perseverance of the Saints.

These five points were recognized as representative of Calvinism by the Synod of Dort (Church of Holland) in 1619.

The classification of Calvin's tenets into these five points were the result of a protest made to the Churches of Holland by followers of one James Arminius (a Dutch seminary professor).

In 1610, just one year after the death of James Arminius, five articles of faith based on his interpretation of the Bible were drawn up by his followers. The Arminians, as his followers came to be called, presented these five doctrines to the State of Holland in the form of a "Remonstrance" (a protest). They insisted that the Belgic Confession of Faith and the Heidelberg Catechism (the official expression of the doctrinal position of the Churches of Holland) be changed to conform to the doctrinal views contained in the Remonstrance. The Arminians objected to the doctrines relating to human inability, predestination, particular redemption, irresistible grace, and the perseverance of the saints. In 1618 the Church of Holland called for a national Synod to meet in Dort for the purpose of examining the views of Arminius. After rejecting the tenets of Arminius they proceeded to publish a point for point response to his views contained in five chapters, the headings of which have been designated as "the five points of Calvinism." (Steele & Thomas, p. 19). (See also Christian's Expositor, Calvinism, Vol X, Num. 2, 1996, p. 137; Palmer, p. 6; Steele & Thomas, p. 13-19.)

Our desire is to:

1. Define each of these concepts or tenets.
2. Consider some of the spiritual ramifications of each tenet and applicable Bible passages.

It is not our aim to exhaustively consider all the pros and cons of each tenet but to show a system of thought and its implications.

**Body:**

**T - Total depravity:**

Defined:

Westminster Confession of Faith (creed of the Presbyterian Church U.S.) states in regard to the sin of Adam and Eve:

Chapter VI...II. By this sin they fell from their original righteousness and communion with God, and so became dead in sin and wholly defiled in all the parts and faculties of soul and body. III. They being the root of all mankind, the guilt of this sin was imputed; and the same death in sin and corrupted nature conveyed to all their posterity, descending from them by ordinary generation. (Palmer, p. 126)

Philadelphia Confession of Faith, also known as the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith:

Ch. 6...2. Our first parents by this sin, fell from their original righteousness and communion with God, and we in them, whereby death came upon all; all becoming dead in sin, and wholly defiled, in all the faculties, and parts of soul, and body.

3. They being the root, and by God's appointment, standing in the room, and stead of all mankind, the guilt of their sin was imputed, and corrupted nature conveyed, to all their posterity, descending from them by ordinary generation, being now conceived in sin, and by nature children of wrath, (the servants of sin, the subjects of death and all other miseries, spiritual, temporal, and eternal, unless the Lord Jesus sets them free...

4. From this original corruption whereby all are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil, do proceed all actual transgressions [Philadelphia Confession of Faith with Catechism, Grand Rapids: Associated Publishers and Authors, Inc., p. 24 (also known as the London Baptist Confession of Faith)].

And:

Adam's act...was counted as the act of each of his descendants...as if they had individually and personally committed that sin. Because of Adam's sin we each stand before God from the moment of our existence as depraved and guilty sinners, for we each sinned "in him" [Christian's Expositor, p. 139: (Steele & Thompson, p. 42)].

The doctrine of "Total Depravity" is also known as "Hereditary Depravity" and "Imputed Adamic Sin," and is sometimes labeled "Original Sin".

Total Depravity is also called "Total Inability" (Steele & Thomas, p. 24; Palmer, p. 14):

When Calvinists speak of man as being totally depraved, they mean that man's nature is corrupt, perverse, and sinful throughout...As a result of this inborn corruption, the natural man is totally unable to do anything spiritually good; thus Calvinists speak of man's "total inability"...the unsaved sinner is incapable of good. The natural man is enslaved to sin; he is a child of Satan, rebellious toward God, blind to truth, corrupt, and unable to save himself or to prepare himself for salvation...(Adam's descendants have lost)...the ability to make right choices in the spiritual realm...they do not have the ABILITY to choose spiritual good over evil (Steele & Thomas, p. 25).

Palmer shows that Calvinism maintains "1. Man cannot *do* the good...2. Man cannot *understand* the good...3. Man cannot *desire* the good" (Palmer, pp. 14-16). On the point of man not being able to understand the good, he illustrates saying that man "is as blind as Cyclops with his one eye burned out...In other words, without the Holy Spirit one is not able to understand the things of God" (Palmer, p. 15-16).

#### Scriptural Considerations:

The Calvinist implies that since man is unable to *understand*, *desire*, or *do* the will of God, then it is impossible for a totally corrupt man to choose to put faith in God, an act of positive obedience (John 6:28-30; 8:24). They reason that since man is unable to choose faith, faith itself must of necessity be a direct gift of God.

Because of the fall, man is unable of himself to savingly believe the gospel. The sinner is dead, blind, and deaf to the things of God...Faith is not something man contributes to salvation but is itself a part of God's gift to the sinner (Steele & Thomas, p. 16).

The Bible, however, points out that God designed the testimony of the written Word of God to produce faith in our hearts (Romans 10:17; John 20:30-31; Ephesians 1:13; Acts 15:7). These passages affirm that faith is our response to credible evidence recorded in the inspired Word of God (2 Timothy 3:16).

The Bible expressly teaches that man has the ability to respond in faith to the Word of God. In the parable of the sower (Matthew 13:3-9, 18-23; Mark 4:3-9, 14-20; Luke 8:5-8, 11-15) we are taught that within the hearts of men there are differences in understanding, commitment, and priorities that cause various responses to the Word of God. Please do not overlook that one of the hearts, illustrated by these differing soils, was called "good and honest" (Luke 8:15) *before* the seed was sown. It was this nature of the heart which allowed the Word of God to be received. With Calvinism a naturally receptive "good and honest" heart is not possible.

Jesus himself made man personally responsible for his faith: "unless you believe that I am He, you shall die in your sins" (John 8:24). Calvinism teaches that one must receive the Holy Spirit before one can have faith. Scriptures teach that it is "after" we believe that we are sealed with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13).

Calvinists make a comparison of a dead body to a dead spirit and speculate, "If a dead body cannot respond to something offered to it, how can a dead spirit respond to the gospel, unless God gives it life to respond?" First of all being "spiritually dead" does not mean that our "spirit" is dead. When we sin we are then separated from the source of eternal spiritual life, God (Isaiah 59:2). This separation is spiritual death. Jesus uses this imagery speaking of those who would hear His word and believe when He says, "Truly, truly, I say to



you, an hour is coming and now is, when *the dead shall hear* the voice of the Son of God; and *those who hear shall live*" (John 5:25). Jesus here says the spiritually dead can "hear," and those who would believe would live.

How does mankind supposedly acquire this "corrupt nature?" Calvinism says that Adam and Eve's corrupt sinful nature was "conveyed, to all their posterity, descending from them by ordinary generation" (Philadelphia..., p. 24). If the guilt of sin and its corrupt nature comes through the flesh, then there is a problem with the fleshly nature of Christ. Mary is the fleshly mother of Christ. The fleshly nature of Christ fulfilled many prophecies and the will of God (Genesis 3:15; Galatians 4:4; Matthew 22:41-46; Hebrews 2:14-17; 2 John 7; etc.). Did Christ somehow become infected with "Adamic" sin from Mary, His fleshly mother? Questions like this contributed to the formation of the Catholic doctrine called the "immaculate conception of Mary" (McClintock & Strong, pp. 506-510). This supposedly would enable Mary to give birth to a sinless yet still fleshly Jesus. Some who disagreed with this doctrine maintained that Christ's spirit was given by God to the conceived Jesus, and in this way Christ's spirit itself sanctified His body so that He was born without sin. They contend that all other men receive their spirits from their fleshly parents, not directly from God, and this is how spiritual corruption is passed on.

The Bible teaches that although we receive physical attributes from our parents, our life force (Acts 17:28) and eternal spirit come from God. "Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live?" (Hebrews 12:9). Zechariah declares that it is "the LORD who stretches out the heavens, lays the foundation of the earth, and forms the spirit of man within him" (Zechariah 12:1).

If the spirits we receive from God come with depravity, then for the Calvinist there is an ethical problem with a God who creates evil (James 1:13). [Calvinist answer: God is sovereign, ie. He can do anything He wants and still be righteous. True, He can do anything He wants, but He will not contradict His nature (act unrighteously). Example: God will not lie. Therefore, it becomes "impossible" (Hebrews 6:18) for God to lie.]

There is another consideration in this line of thinking; if our spirits emanate from our parents, how does the child of two Christian parents come to be born with a corrupt, depraved spirit? Calvinism says that "this corruption of nature...doth remain in those that are regenerated" [Westminster..., Chapter VI..V (Palmer, p. 126)]. The Scriptures teach, however, that all who have obeyed the truth have "purified" their souls (1 Peter 1:22), "cleansing their hearts" (Acts 15:9). The Bible affirms that there most assuredly are those who are "pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8). How, then, can two "pure" souls spawn a totally corrupt soul? Souls can not be "pure" and "not pure" at the same time.

The truth is that the spirit God gives us as children is not depraved (Hebrews 12:9; Zechariah 12:1). God initially gives us a pure spirit for our bodies, but we mess it up. Paul said;

And I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive, and I died; and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me; for sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, deceived me, and through it killed me (Romans 7:9-11 NAS).

Paul maintains that he was "once alive" spiritually to God. Paul is speaking of his own spiritual life, or fellowship with God, as a child, before he sinned. But then "the commandment came."

This is not speaking of the inscription by God of the Ten commandments on Mt. Sinai (Galatians 4:24), it is speaking of the childhood of Paul, before the law "became known" to him [Thayer's Greek English Lexicon, B,2,b, p. 251, (Strong's #2064)]. Before the age of accountability, Paul was "alive" to God. Then, at some point, when Paul knew right from wrong, he was deceived by sin, committed sin and spiritually died. (See also Deuteronomy 1:39.) But remember, Paul was originally "alive" to God. This cannot mesh with the doctrine of Total Depravity or being "born in sin."

How does man become a sinner? "Behold, I have found only this, that God made men upright, but they have sought out many devices" (Ecclesiastes 7:29 NAS). Solomon, in his inspired insight, says that God makes men "upright," then man chooses to become a sinner. James details "...each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death" (James 1:14-15 NAS).

It is not our spiritual *death* that creates lust and sin, but our *lust* which creates sin and spiritual death (see also Romans 6:23). Calvinism says it is our being born in sin (naturally naughty) that causes all our sins. "From this original corruption...do proceed all actual transgressions (Philadelphia..., p. 24). John MacArthur, a Calvinist, put it this way: "Committing sinful acts does not make us sinners; we commit sinful acts because we *are* sinners" [Ephesians (Commentary), John MacArthur, Moody Press, 1986, p. 54]. This is not what the Bible says. Scriptures teach that it is our own personal sins and iniquities which bring about our "separation" (Isaiah 59:2) from God. "And you were dead in *your* trespasses and sins" (Ephesians 2:1), the Scriptures record.

The Scriptures are explicit, we shall *not* be held accountable for the sins of others.

"Yet you say, 'Why should the son not bear the punishment for the father's iniquity?' When the son has practiced justice and righteousness, and has observed all My statutes and done them, he shall surely live. The person who sins will die. The son will not bear the punishment for the father's iniquity, nor will the father bear the punishment for the son's iniquity; the righteousness of the righteous will be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself" (Ezekiel 18:19-20).

We may have to live with the temporal consequences of a sin we commit, even though we have been forgiven. And we may even physically suffer because of another's sin. But we will not suffer eternally for another's sin, or receive the guilt of their sin. [We are living with the consequences of Adam's sin (physical death), not the guilt (spiritual death); 1 Corinthians 15:20-22.] If we lose our soul, it will be because of our own sin and failure to receive forgiveness. (See also Deuteronomy 24:16; 2 Kings 14:6; Jeremiah 31:29-30; Ezekiel 18:1-4; 28:15.)

"So then every one shall give an account of himself to God" (Romans 14:12). If God created us totally depraved and unable to obey, why would He call upon us to "give an account" of ourselves to Him? The concept of God making us accountable to Him for doing something He knows is impossible for us, is incompatible with the true nature of God (2 Peter 3:9; 2 Timothy 2:3-4). Judgment itself suggests that we are *able to respond* (responsible) in obedience to God. We shall be called upon to "give an account" of ourselves to God. "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad" (2

Corinthians 5:10).

We have spent much on this first tenet of Calvinism, for if this foundational concept is incorrect, then the rest of Calvin's system of thought is faulty. If we cut down the "trunk" of Calvin's doctrinal system, the "branches" fall with it.

## **U - Unconditional election:**

Defined:

The Westminster Confession of Faith (1648):

Chapter III, I. God from all eternity did by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass...III. By the decree of God, for the manifestation of his glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto life, and others foreordained to everlasting death. IV. These angels and men, thus predestinated and foreordained, are particularly and unchangeably designed; and their number so certain and definite that it cannot be either increased or diminished (Palmer, p. 124).

And:

The doctrine of election declares that God, before the foundation of the world, chose certain individuals from among the fallen members of Adam's race to be the objects of His undeserved favor. These, and these only, He purposed to save. God could have chosen to save all men (for He had the power and authority to do so) or He could have chosen to save none (for He was under no obligation to show mercy to any) - but He did neither. Instead He chose to save some and to exclude others. His eternal choice of particular sinners unto

salvation was not based upon any foreseen act or response on the part of those selected, but was based solely on His own good pleasure and sovereign will. Thus election was not determined by, or conditioned upon, anything that men would do, but resulted entirely from God's self-determined purpose (Steele & Thomas, p. 30).

### Scriptural Considerations:

Calvinism says: Because of being born in sin (Hereditary Depravity), all of us are spiritually dead, so dead we are unable to even have faith. Therefore, in order for us to be saved, God alone had to save us. We know that everyone doesn't "get saved" so, God had to choose those to whom He would give grace (Unconditional Election).

The first glaring contradiction between Calvinism and Scripture is the Bible's teaching on the impartiality of God. Paul, in discussing the justice of God, emphatically states "...there is no partiality with God" (Romans 2:11). Peter, after preaching Christ for the first time to the Gentiles, says "I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him" (Acts 10:34-35). God "desires all men to be saved" (1 Timothy 2:4) but only those who fear and obey Him will be "welcome to Him." The problem keeping all men from being saved is not the sovereign will of God, but the arbitrary will of men.

The Bible does teach "election" and "predestination:"

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as *He chose us* in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should

be holy and blameless before Him. In love *He predestined us* to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will (Ephesians 1:3-5 NAS).

The phrase "He chose us" is from a word which originally meant "to lay out together." It carried the idea of *making a selection* or *choosing* from among different objects or things. Those, therefore, who were chosen by God were chosen from what consisted of many varied groups or persons. Rather than an arbitrary choice of particular individuals, God *chose* to receive all those who are "in Christ." He chose a class of people: those who in faith would obey Jesus (Hebrews 5:9).

This relationship called "in Him" or "in Christ" and is where "all" or "every spiritual blessing" is found (Ephesians 1:3). Ephesians the first chapter lists seven spiritual blessings that are found only "in Him": 1. We are chosen (1:4), 2. We are predestined to be adopted (1:5), 3. We are given grace (1:6), 4. We are redeemed and forgiven (1:7), 5. We are allowed to know the mystery of His will (1:9), 6. We are to obtain an inheritance (1:11), 7. We are sealed with the Spirit (1:13). [See also Ephesians (Commentary), Glen Osburn, Contending For The Faith Pub.]

God's decision or choice pertaining to whom He would save, was made before the world was built, that is, before its "foundation" was laid (Ephesians 1:4). Because of God's impartiality this choice consists of individuals within a particular group. He chose to save those who had the quality of being "holy and blameless" (Ephesians 1:4; 5:27; Colossians 1:22). This *separation* from sin and guilt is attained only "in Christ," and maintained by us (2 Corinthians 7:1; 2 Peter 1:10).

The word "predestine" means literally "to set out boundaries in advance." God staked out the boundaries for the group he

would adopt. The concept of this word is described in John's gospel:

"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter by the door into the fold of the sheep, but climbs up some other way, he is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is a shepherd of the sheep. To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name, and leads them out. When he puts forth all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. And a stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers." This figure of speech Jesus spoke to them, but they did not understand what those things were which He had been saying to them. Jesus therefore said to them again, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture" (John 10:1-9 NAS).

The imagery here suggests that the "sheep" represent people. God *set out a boundary in advance* that those in the "fold of the sheep" were to be the "saved." The "fold of the sheep" represents the church where salvation is (Ephesians 1:22-23; 5:23). The way to get into that "fold" is through "the door," which is Christ Jesus. God predestined, or "set out boundaries in advance," that the "fold of the sheep" or *the church* be where salvation is and that "anyone" who wanted to be saved enter "through" Christ. Anyone? Yes, anyone: "If *anyone* enters through Me, he shall be saved" (John 10:9). Jesus also said "you are *unwilling* to come to Me, that you may have life" (John 5:40). (See also John 10:16 & Ephesians 2:14-16.)



By His sovereign decree, all those "in Christ" (Ephesians 1:3) are in that group called the church (Ephesians 1:22-23) of which Christ is the Savior (Ephesians 5:23). Whether a person *is* or *is not* in God's church is dependent on whether that person has in faith chosen to obey Jesus (Hebrews 5:9; Romans 8:29-30). God's call to come and be saved "in Christ" is offered to all through or by the gospel (2 Thessalonians 2:14). You get "into" Christ when in faith you respond to the gospel and are "baptized into Christ" (Galatians 3:26-27). This is a *general* election, as opposed to the *unconditional, particular* election of the Calvinist.

## L - Limited Atonement:

Defined:

Christ's redeeming work was intended to save the elect only and actually secured salvation for them. His death was a substitutionary endurance of the penalty of sin in the place of certain specified sinners. In addition to putting away the sins of His people, Christ's redemption secured everything necessary for their salvation, including faith which unites them to Him. The gift of faith is infallibly applied by the Spirit to all for whom Christ died, thereby guaranteeing their salvation (Steele & Thomas, p. 17).

This tenet is known negatively as "Limited Atonement," but put positively as "Particular Redemption."

Scriptural Considerations:

Let's recap. Calvinism says: Because of being born in sin, all of us are spiritually dead, so dead we are unable to even have faith (Total Depravity). Therefore, in order for us to be saved,

God alone has to save us. We know that everyone doesn't "get saved," so, God had to choose those to whom He would give grace (Unconditional Election). Jesus couldn't have died for everyone or everyone would be saved. So, because some are lost, we know Jesus didn't die for everyone (Limited Atonement).

Did Jesus die for everyone? Let's see what the Scriptures say:

"And He Himself is the propitiation (atoning sacrifice) for our sins; and *not for ours only*, but also *for those of the whole world*" (1 John 2:2).

"For God so loved *the world*, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

"For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who *gave Himself as a ransom for all*, the testimony borne at the proper time" (1 Timothy 2:5-6).

"For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that *one died for all*, therefore all died; and *He died for all*, that they who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf " (2 Corinthians 5:14-15).

"But we do see Him... Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that by the grace of God He might *taste death for everyone*" (Hebrews 2:9).

(See also: 2 Peter 3:9; Matthew 11:28-30; Revelation 3:20.)

Can we tell anyone we will ever meet that God loves them, and Jesus died for them? Absolutely! But, what about the Calvinist?

As a Reformed (ie. Calvinist) Christian, the writer believes that counselors must not tell any unsaved counselee that Christ died for him, for they cannot say that. No man knows except Christ himself who are his elect for whom he died (Competent to Counsel, Jay Adams, Presbyterian & Reformed Pub. Co., 1975, p. 70).

We do not need to worry (unlike the Calvinist) that we may have inadvertently lied to someone about Jesus dying for them just because we were unaware if they were one of "the elect."

### I - Irresistible Grace:

Defined:

Although the general outward call of the gospel can be, and often is, rejected, the special inward call of the Spirit never fails to result in the conversion of those to whom it is made. This special call is not made to all sinners but is issued to the elect only! The Spirit is in no way dependent upon their help or cooperation for success in His work of bringing them to Christ. It is for this reason that Calvinists speak of the Spirit's call and of God's grace in saving sinners as being "efficacious," "invincible," or "irresistible." For the grace which the Holy Spirit extends to the elect cannot be thwarted or refused, it never fails to bring them to true faith in Christ (Steele & Thomas, p. 49)!

## Scriptural Considerations:

Let's recap again. Calvinism says: Because of being born in sin, all of us are spiritually dead, so dead we are unable to even have faith (Total Depravity). Therefore, in order for us to be saved, God alone had to save us. We know that everyone doesn't "get saved," so, God had to choose those to whom He would give grace (Unconditional Election). Jesus couldn't have died for everyone or everyone would be saved. So, because some are lost, we know Jesus didn't die for everyone (Limited Atonement). If you're one of the ones God picked, you can't change it (Irresistible Grace).

Stephen said of the disobedient Jews who had deceitfully brought him to trial:

"You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did. "Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become; you who received the law as ordained by angels, and yet did not keep it" (Acts 7:51-53).

Stephen said this rowdy assembly was "resisting the Holy Spirit." Evidently the work of the Spirit can be resisted. Their fathers had resisted the Spirit by persecuting the prophets and killing the ones who announced Christ. But the sons were "resisting the Holy Spirit" through betraying and murdering Christ, and even though they had the law, they "did not keep it." When people today refuse to obey the word of God, they also are *resisting* the Spirit. [We can also "grieve" (Ephesians 4:30) and *insult* "the Spirit of grace" (Hebrews 10:29)].

The Spirit's call is to all:

And the Spirit and the bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost (Revelation 22:17).

Jesus said to some, "you are *unwilling* to come to Me, that you may have life" (John 5:40). The Spirit's call is not "irresistible" for man has often resisted yielding to the Spirit's invitation and instruction. Therefore, the grace which God offers can be resisted by the insolent will of man.

**P - Perseverance of the Saints:**

Defined:

The Westminster Confession of Faith (1648):

Chapter XVII, I. They, whom God has accepted in His Beloved, effectually called, and sanctified by His Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace, but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved (Palmer, p. 130; Steele & Thomas, p. 56).

This doctrine is also known as; "Once saved, always saved...Perseverance of God...Preservation of the saints...(and)...Eternal security" (Palmer, pp. 68-69).

Here's an excerpt from a Calvinist tract presenting some unavoidable inferences:

We take the position that a Christian's sins do not damn his soul! The way a Christian lives, what he says, his

character, his conduct, or his attitude toward other people have nothing whatever to do with the salvation of his soul...All the prayers a man may pray, all the Bibles he may read, all the churches he may belong to, all the services he may attend, all the sermons he may practice, all the debts he may pay, all the ordinances he may observe, all the laws he may keep, all the benevolent acts he may perform will not make his soul one whit safer; AND ALL THE SINS HE MAY COMMIT FROM IDOLATRY TO MURDER WILL NOT MAKE HIS SOUL IN ANY MORE DANGER...THE WAY A MAN LIVES HAS NOTHING WHATEVER TO DO WITH THE SALVATION OF HIS SOUL" [A Discussion Which Involves a Subject Pertinent to All Men, Rev. Sam Morris, pp. 1-2: (Calvinism, Samuel G. Dawson, p. 13)].

#### Scriptural Considerations:

Let's recap one more time. Calvinism says: Because of being born in sin, all of us are spiritually dead, so dead we are unable to even have faith (Total Depravity). Therefore, in order for us to be saved, God alone had to save us. We know that everyone doesn't "get saved," so, God had to choose those to whom He would give grace (Unconditional Election). Jesus couldn't have died for everyone or everyone would be saved. So, because some are lost, we know Jesus didn't die for everyone (Limited Atonement). If you're one of the ones God picked, you can't change it (Irresistible Grace). And since God picked you to be saved and you can't do anything about it, there is no sin that you could ever commit that would cause you to lose your salvation (Perseverance of the Saints).

Calvinists, speaking of salvation, say:

If you ain't got it, you can't get it.  
If you get it, you can't lose it.

If you lose it, you never had it.

To verify that they approve of this little aphorism:

The doctrine of the perseverance of the saints does not maintain that all who *profess* the Christian faith are certain of heaven. It is *saints*--those who are set apart by the Spirit--who *persevere* to the end. It is *believers*--those who are given true, living faith in Christ--who are *secure* and safe in Him. Many who profess to believe fall away, but they do not fall from grace for they were never in grace. True believers do fall into temptations, and they do commit grievous sins, but these sins do not cause them to lose their salvation or separate them from Christ (Steele & Thomas, p. 56).

Because of this, when discussing the "possibility of apostasy," a Calvinist will often try to escape the force of a passage by insisting that the person being discussed was *not really* a Christian. They say that he might have *professed to be*, or even *thought he was*, but in reality *had never been* redeemed by the blood of Christ. We want to look at some passages which cannot possibly be speaking of anyone but those who have been redeemed by the blood of Christ, those who are unquestionably Christians:

For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God, and put Him to open shame (Hebrews 6:4-6).

Someone has "fallen away" ["if" (v:6 KJ, NIV) is not in the greek text]. This is someone who has "once been enlightened," has "tasted of the heavenly gift," and has "been made partakers of the Holy Spirit," etc. This cannot possibly be speaking of anyone but a once true Christian. This passage is contending that it is possible for a Christian to *fall away* to such an extent that they find it impossible to repent. (Contextually it is speaking of ex-Jewish Christians who would leave Christianity altogether, and probably return to the Old Law: Hebrews 2:1-3; 3:12; 4:1, 11; 6:11-12; 10:23, 32-39; 12:3, 12-13.)

As a Christian we are instructed to "repent...and pray," if we sin (Acts 8:22, note Simon was a true believer: Acts 8:13). "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves (2 Peter 2:1).

These fallen, now false, teachers were "even denying the Master who bought them," consequently "bringing swift destruction upon themselves." The phrase "who bought them" is speaking of the redemption of Christ (1 Peter 1:18-19). These false teachers were going to deny Christ, the very one who had redeemed them. Would this cause them to lose their salvation? Jesus says, "whoever shall deny Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 10:32-33).

For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain terrifying expectation of judgment, and the fury of a fire which will consume the



adversaries. Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace (Hebrews 10:26-29)?

This passage is speaking of one who had been "sanctified" by "the blood of the covenant," something he now regards as "unclean." This is someone who "after receiving the knowledge of the truth" has "insulted the Spirit of grace." This was a true "sanctified" Christian who, without repentance, will suffer a "severer punishment" than death.

"I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing. "If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch, and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned (John 15:5-6).

This is addressed to those who do "abide in" Christ, a Christian. Jesus warns those who would *not* continue to "abide in" Him that they would be "cast...into the fire." Abiding "in" Christ means to continue being in fellowship with Christ through obeying His word (2 John 1:8-9).

Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you. And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law. You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace (Galatians 5:2-4).

Paul is addressing Christians in the churches of Galatia. Paul is warning those who had benefited from the grace of God found in Christ, that if they went back to seek justification in the Old Law (represented by receiving circumcision), they would be "severed from Christ." They would find that Christ would "be of no benefit" to them for they would have "fallen from grace." "Certainly no one can be severed from something to which he has not been joined, and one cannot 'fall out of something he has not been in" (Calvinism, Samuel G. Dawson, p. 17).

But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree, do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you. You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in."

Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear; for if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will He spare you. Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God's kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off. And they also, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in; for God is able to graft them in again. For if you were cut off from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more shall these who are the natural branches be grafted into their own olive tree (Romans 11:17-24)?

The Jews are represented as *natural* olive branches, and Gentile Christians are represented as *wild* olive branches. The thing that is said to connect the branches to the tree of fellowship with God is belief. The warning is that the Jews

were "broken off" because of "their unbelief" in Christ, and the Gentile Christians would "also be cut off" if they failed to continue in "faith." Some, "believe for a while, and in time of temptation fall away" (Luke 8:13). "Take care, *brethren*, lest there should be *in anyone of you* an evil, unbelieving heart, in *falling away from* the living God" (Hebrews 3:12 NAS). If, however, the Jews "do not continue in their unbelief," they "will be grafted in; for God is able to graft them in again."

For if because of food your brother is hurt, you are no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy with your food him for whom Christ died (Romans 14:15). Also, "For through your knowledge he who is weak is ruined, the brother for whose sake Christ died" (1 Corinthians 8:11).

Both of these passages are warning us to recognize we may inadvertently contribute to a brother's sin against his own conscience (1 Corinthians 8:7, 10, 12; Romans 14:14, 23). If we are not sensitive to the conscience of young "weak" Christians, we may encourage them to do something against what their conscience says is pleasing to God. When our "weak" brother "doubts" but goes ahead and does what he doubts is right, "he is condemned...because...whatever is not from faith is sin" (Romans 14:23). The believing "brother for whose sake Christ died" did not act "from faith," he sinned, and is now "hurt," "ruined," and "destroy(ed)." This is a sanctified Christian, one "for whom Christ died," who has been spiritually *destroyed* through sin. The word "destroy" in Romans 14:23 means "...to lose eternal salvation" [Thayer's, p. 64 (Strong's #622)] The Bible goes on to say to those who are not sensitive of another brother's conscience, "And thus, by sinning against the brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ" (1 Corinthians 8:12).

The passages cited above clearly speak of sanctified Christians losing their salvation. It is, therefore, possible for us to sin as Christians and revert to a state that is worse than before:

*For if after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first.* For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment delivered to them. It has happened to them according to the true proverb, "A dog returns to its own vomit," and, "A sow, after washing, returns to wallowing in the mire" (2 Peter 2:20-22).

Because we can sin, we must regard the warning: "therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed *lest he fall*" (1 Corinthians 10:12).

### **Conclusion:**

Calvinism says: Because of being born in sin, all of us are spiritually dead, so dead we are unable to even have faith (Total Depravity). Therefore, in order for us to be saved, God alone had to save us. We know that everyone doesn't "get saved," so, God had to choose those to whom He would give grace (Unconditional Election). Jesus couldn't have died for everyone or everyone would be saved. So, because some are lost, we know Jesus didn't die for everyone (Limited Atonement). If you're one of the ones God picked, you can't change it (Irresistible Grace). And since God picked you to be saved and you can't do anything about it, there is no sin that you could ever commit that would cause you to lose your salvation (Perseverance of the Saints).

However, as we have shown, the Bible says: We all are born spiritually alive to God and innocent to sin. But there comes a point of accountability, a time when we are responsible for understanding and doing the will of God. There comes a time when we lust, commit sin (Romans 3:23), and, therefore, lose our fellowship with a Holy God (spiritual death). As sinners we then need to hear (Acts 15:7), believe (Mark 1:15; 16:16), and obey the gospel (2 Thessalonians 1:8). [This includes repentance (Acts 17:30), and confessing Christ (Matthew 10:32).] When we obey the gospel, we are "redeemed" (1 Peter 1:18-19) and placed "into Christ" (Galatians 3:26-27). Once "in Christ," we are responsible to grow in "knowledge" (2 Peter 3:18), all the while keeping our body and mind obedient to what we have learned (1 Corinthians 9:27). We are aware that we can lose our salvation through careless sin (2 John 1:8; Matthew 12:36-37; Hebrews 10:26-29). If we sin, as a child of God we have the privilege of penitently calling upon our Father for forgiveness (1 John 2:1-2; 1:9; Hebrews 4:15-16). If we abandon our Father, we must find repentance, come back to our Father in prayer and confess our unfaithfulness; like the penitent prodigal son (Luke 15:11-24). If our sin has caused a breach in our fellowship with our brethren, we must let them know of our change of heart (James 5:16).

We are not born "Totally Depraved" but have a free will, an ability to choose right from wrong, that we will give an account for in the Judgment; the election is not an "Unconditional Election" but conditioned upon our abiding in the body of Christ; the atonement of Christ is not a "Limited Atonement" but is offered to all; we can insult the Spirit of grace, therefore, it cannot be an "Irresistible Grace"; and we can lose our salvation through sin, therefore, the concept of "once saved, always saved" or "Perseverance of the Saints" is not Biblical. The reasoning of Calvinism is not of God.

The Scriptures teach that salvation is of grace:

"For the grace of God has appeared, *bringing salvation to **all** men*" (Titus 2:11). The Scriptures also say, speaking of Jesus, "And having been made perfect, He became to ***all those who obey Him*** the source of eternal salvation" (Hebrews 5:9).

We can correctly conclude that: Jesus, through grace, offers salvation to all, but only those who choose to obey Him will receive God's grace and eternal salvation.

Will you obey Him?

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